

US Provokes Tensions Between EU and China Over Taiwan

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It is a common practice in American foreign policy to provoke divisions, frictions, and tensions in the global scenario so that strategic alliances between different poles are avoided, which favors the existence of a world hegemony on the part of Washington. For decades, the Americans have boycotted alliances that involved Western nations and US’ geopolitical enemies. This is what is currently happening in EU-China ties.

Like the US itself, the EU recognizes mainland China and maintains official diplomatic ties with Beijing, being a signatory to the One China Policy. The bloc also maintains relations with Taiwan but only through para-diplomatic representative offices. Historically, due to China’s high international relevance, even the greatest western powers have sought to respect the Beijing’s internal issues, interacting to Taiwan only through para-diplomatic relations, ensuring a non-intervention strategy that benefits all sides.

However, the troubled relationship between the US and the EU – in which Europeans continuously submit themselves to abusive impositions from Washington – is collaterally leading Europe to tensions with China. In recent months, the US government has signaled several times that it is preparing a radical revision of its One China Policy. President Biden even commented that Washington would support Taiwan militarily against China in the event of conflict, in addition to the usual ambiguous statements about the status of the strait that separates the island from the mainland – which the White House says is “international territory”. In the midst of this context, Europe has tried to avoid such polemics as much as possible, but increasingly its American allies are pushing them to adhere to an anti-Chinese stance.

In June, the European Parliament published a report expressing “concerns” about Chinese military development and “China’s failure to comply with its obligations under national and international law to respect human rights”. In the same document, it was stated that “China’s diplomacy of intimidation and manipulative disinformation campaigns” regarding

Taiwan should be condemned. Furthermore, it was said that Taiwan would be a European “key partner and democratic ally in the Indo-Pacific”. In the text there were also several other negative mentions of China regarding topics like Hong Kong, Macau and Xinjiang.

In the same month, Slovakia signed a judicial cooperation agreement with Taiwan. The document establishes a series of partnerships for the judicial resolution of civil and commercial matters. This was the first agreement of this nature to be signed between an EU member state and the island, which is why it was considered an “extraordinary achievement” by Taiwanese diplomacy and will certainly serve as a precedent for other countries – and the EU as a whole – to approach Taipei.

In April, the EU and US had jointly issued a statement condemning some Chinese actions in the Taiwan Strait and demanding a “peaceful resolution” to disputes over the site. Although it was not a bellicose statement, it was somewhat disrespectful to Chinese sovereignty, as the US and EU recognize, at least officially, Taiwan as Chinese territory, which means that they also must recognize the Strait as part of China.

Previously, in January, two cases also caused great friction between China and the EU. One of them was the bloc’s initiative to file a lawsuit in the WTO against China due to the sanctions imposed by Beijing on Lithuania, an EU country that had had a few months earlier received Taiwanese diplomats in its capital, virtually recognizing Taipei’s “sovereignty”. Another case was Slovenia’s initiative to boost bilateral relations with Taiwan in the diplomatic and economic sphere and recognize the island’s “right to self-government”, which generated a war of words between Chinese and European officials.

The great mark in diplomatic relations between Europeans and Taiwanese, however, is from last year. In November 2021, the European Parliament sent an official delegation to Taipei for the first time in history, in a truly unprecedented diplomatic effort. Among the various statements made by the European authorities in Taiwan, there were notes of solidarity with the local de facto government in its search for “freedom” in the face of “Chinese pressure”. Obviously, China interpreted the event as an affront, which greatly worsened Sino-European bilateral relations.

There were also several other recent episodes that demonstrate an accelerated rapprochement between the EU and Taipei and the bloc’s gradual distancing from China. For example, European nations were individually invited to collaborate in military drills by US-led anti-China alliances such as QUAD and AUKUS. Several American and European think tanks have encouraged the EU’s military proximity to such groups in order to foment a kind of “global alliance” against China.

It is impossible to analyze these data and ignore the active participation of the US. All the radical maneuvers against China taken by the EU are directly related the belligerent turn taken by Washington since 2021. This becomes even more evident when we remember that in 2020, just one month before Biden inaugurated, the EU had advanced the terms for a great deal with China, the EU-China Investment Agreement. Even with Trump’s trade war, Europeans were willing to cooperate with China and approved the agreement, but the project does not seem to have resisted Biden’s aggressive policy, which significantly expanded US hostilities against countries considered enemies – mainly China and Russia.

With China becoming NATO’s central target, the China-EU situation is about to worsen. Considering that a significant part of the EU is also member of NATO, adopting the new

guidelines of the military alliance will mean an open adherence on the part of European nations to a radical anti-Chinese policy. So, the tendency is for frictions between Europeans and Chinese to increase significantly in the coming months.

In fact, once again the EU is harmed by insisting on a foreign policy obedient to American impositions. The non-implementation of the EU-China Investment Agreement, for example, is a defeat for Europe, which loses a great opportunity to improve its trade relations. In the name of pseudo-humanitarian arguments of concern for Taiwan, Europeans are simply following American orders, becoming unnecessarily hostile to China, and failing to secure their own interests.

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